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Although the King James Version of the Bible has had considerable impact on English language and literature, it is seldom studied in American secondary schools. Even before the Supreme Court decision of 1963 banned religious exercises in public schools, the study of the Bible was sketchy and non-systematic. Since the decision, certain conclusions about the status of the Bible in the curriculum can be drawn. (1) Except for programs designed to circumvent the law, few schools provide an opportunity for students to study Biblical literature. (2) Because Biblical literature is an essential part of a student's literary education, the need for teaching the Bible as literature is clear. (3) The teaching of the Bible as literature is within the law. (4) Traditional textbooks provide only an inadequate sampling of Biblical materials. (5) The Bible remains a controversial aspect of the curriculum, and, therefore, teachers should frame a clear philosophy of why they are using Biblical selections. (JS)

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The Bible in the English Program

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THIS IS THE AGE of the king-sized compact car and the four-thousand-dollar luxury station wagon with an optional "economy-minded" engine, of houses financed on thirty-year mortgages and bought by transient occupants. One-third of the nation is overfed and overweight, while another third endures on a substandard diet. The chief responses to promiscuity are antibiotics and "the pill." This is an age of paradox.

In some respects, education may be fifty years behind the times, as is sometimes charged. But, not in its paradoxes. Here it has surely met its quota. Grammar books insist on a single standard of usage to students who already know that the most sophisticated users of language are those who move most comfortably among several levels and functional varieties. Some eleventh-grade anthologies purport to teach about American life and letters but stay scrupulously clean of selections by or about members of any identifiable minority group. And finally, apart from the frequently optional twelfth-grade course, complete programs in literature and humanities relegate the Bible to the footnotes for modern poetry.

In the long run, the issue is larger than any single English program. The Bible in all its English translations, but in particular the King James Version, has had considerable impact on English language and letters. In still other translations, it has helped shape the growth of all the languages and literatures of Western civilization. If what follows concentrates on linguistic and literary implications of the present state of Bible study, it is because these are most directly related to the English program. It is not to deny that Biblical sources in their several translations hold the roots for many of those values and attitudes and concepts that constitute our human and our humane commitment today.

Support for including Biblical selections in a program of literary studies comes from several sides. Judged as a work of literature, the King James version of the Bible has been called "the noblest monument of English prose. . . . The Biblical style is characterized not merely by homely vigour and pithiness of phrase, but also by a singular nobility of diction and by a rhythmic quality which is . . . unrivalled in its beauty." The Commission on Trends in Education, appointed by the Modern Language Association, published in *PMLA*, for December 1950, its statement on "Literature in American Education." Arguing that a proper function of literature is to provide and to extend "experience in quality," this committee of scholars stated, "The power of the King James version of the Bible has been, not merely in its precepts, but in its moving quality as literature — in its drama, its narrative, its poetry, its incomparable style. So it is with all of the best in humane letters."

A somewhat more practical case for teaching selections from the Bible was made in 1958 by members of the Basic Issues Conference, who stated, "poets, novelists, and playwrights have drawn upon . . . Biblical passages . . . which are often unfamiliar to the modern student in school or college, but cumulatively significant for an understanding of Western culture." Concrete evidence for this argument is emerging in a study now in progress by James R. Squire, Executive

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Secretary of the National Council of Teachers of English, a study of the sources of allusions in literature commonly taught in American secondary schools. With Greek mythology and the *Iliad*, the Bible ranks as one of the three richest sources for allusions.

The participants in the Basic Issues Conference agreed on a statement of fundamental issues in the teaching of English. Some of the Basic Issue conferees later framed a hypothetical basis for an articulated curriculum, in which they recommend for Grades 4-6 "study in the field of classical, Nordic, and Biblical story . . ."; in the junior high school, "*Job, Ruth, Jonah,* chapters from *Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, David, and Matthew* . . ." Some will question the appropriateness of certain of these selections for particular students in these grades. Indeed, those involved advanced such a curriculum primarily as "a hypothesis to test." But the importance they attach to studying the Bible as literature is clear.

Similar concern with the place of the Bible in an articulated English program appears in the work at the University of Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, supported first by the Woods Foundation and subsequently by Project English of the U.S. Office of Education. With the help of Nebraska teachers, directors of the center have prepared pilot teaching materials for English, Grades 1-12, for testing in selected schools across the state. Typical of the work in literature is a four-week unit in Grade 10 on "The Hebraic-Christian Tradition" within a larger consideration of "Man's Picture of Nature." For this unit the recommended text is *The Pocket Bible* (or "a family-approved version of The Holy Bible.") Core readings include *Genesis,* Psalm 104, and parables in *Matthew* 5, 6, 7, 13, and 24.

Supreme Court Decision

For its intrinsic literary qualities, for its capacity to enlarge experience and to ennoble the human spirit, for its impact on styles in subsequent literature and the wealth of allusions to it, the case for studying the Bible as literature is widely and strongly made. But in June of 1963 the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a decision that, although not intended to do so, has threatened the place of the Bible in existing literature programs and discouraged some who would have added Biblical selections to programs which did not already include them. After hearing two separate cases, the Court handed down a single decision that ruled unconstitutional not only a Pennsylvania law requiring the reading of ten verses of the Bible without comment at the opening of each school day, along with the requirement of a local school district that the Lord's Prayer be recited each day, but also the regulation of the Baltimore Board of School Commissioners requiring daily either the recitation of the Lord's Prayer or the reading of one chapter from the Bible. In both Pennsylvania and Baltimore children who did not want to participate in the exercises could have been excused. On the same day, the United States Supreme Court reversed an earlier ruling by the Florida Supreme Court that certain practices including daily Bible reading and recitation of prayers in the public schools were not in violation of the First or Fourteenth Amendment so long as students would be excused from the exercise upon parental request.

Key issues at stake in the United States Supreme Court decision were the principles that the government shall not establish any religion or sect and that each individual shall be free to practice his religion in his own way, central concerns in Amendments I and XIV of the Bill of Rights. What was not at stake, although the issue remains clouded for many, is the right of the schools to teach Biblical selections as part of the cultural and intellectual heritage of America and

the Western world. The cases in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Florida involved the reading of Biblical selections as part of an exercise that was clearly devotional or religious in intent.

However, the decision did not apply to the teaching of the Bible as literature or to an objective study of comparative religions. In fact, the Court departed from its normal practice of answering only those questions put to it. The majority opinion, written by Justice Clark, stated, "It might well be that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion, or the history of religion, and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly can be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historical qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment." As Theodore Powell summarized the issues in "Prayer and the Bible in the Public School," a discussion reported simultaneously in *The United Church Herald*, the *Reconstructionist*, and *Ave Maria*, reprinted by the National Conference of Christians and Jews: "This distinction [is] between the educational and the devotional purpose. The school may not pray, but it must teach. Religion cannot be excluded from education; nor does the Court's decision intend this."

Before the Decision

Any consideration of the effects of this decision must take into account the status of the Bible in public schools prior to the decision. It was the situation that prevailed before June 1963 the Court was considering. According to a 1962 report by Joseph W. Harrison in the *Tennessee Law Review*, no state constitution explicitly prohibited reading the Bible as such, although twelve state constitutions specifically prohibited sectarian instruction in public schools. Consequently, questions as to the legality of Bible reading had been left to the courts. But state statutes were more confusing than the constitutions. Although half the states had laws that prohibited sectarian instruction in public schools, in most of these states Bible reading was not interpreted as sectarian instruction. In fact, seven states had actually passed laws requiring that the Bible be read in the schools and other laws that prohibited sectarian institution. By 1962 twelve states in all required Bible reading; six others had passed permissive legislation making it optional. In nineteen other states Bible reading had been made acceptable through court decisions, rulings of the Attorney General or the department of education, or by local custom. The inconsistency from constitution to statute to local practice was highlighted by Mr. Harrison, who concluded, "The statute which requires daily Bible verse reading undoubtedly violates both the Tennessee Constitution and the United States Constitution."

Further evidence that local or state regulations were contrary to established law comes from a national survey of the influence of religion on school programs. The author, R. B. Dierenfield, reporting his study in *Religious Education* for May-June 1961, concluded, "Many of the practices which are employed by school systems to deal with religious influences might be called into question in the light of legal decisions on the subject." In a nation-wide study of 4,000 communities, Dierenfield discovered that although fewer than one in twenty of the responding schools reported having regular classes in the Bible, approximately 40 percent of the schools indicated that Bible reading was conducted as a "non-curricular activity" (in homerooms, assemblies, and similar official settings apart from the conventional five-seven periods which comprise the "instructional program).

Furthermore, over 50 percent reported units on the Bible in world history courses and 32 percent reported such units in literature courses. Both geographical location and size of the community played a significant part in these results. Although the national average was approximately 40 percent for schools reporting regular Bible reading as part of the "noncurricular" program, this figure rose to more than three-fourths in the South and two-thirds in the East. It dropped to a low of 11 percent in the West. Similarly, while homeroom devotional services were held in less than 3 percent of Western schools and in about 6 percent of Midwestern schools, they were conducted in two-thirds and three-fourths of Eastern and Southern schools respectively. While distribution of Gideon Bibles was favored in about half the schools nationally, this figure rose to more than 80 percent of schools in the South. Only 35 percent of schools in communities with populations over 100,000 favored such distribution, but 60 percent of schools in communities with populations ranging from 500-2500 did so.

A statewide study by Earl R. Humble in Texas supported these general conclusions concerning Southern schools. Nearly 80 percent of the schools reporting had some form of Bible reading. In over one-third of the schools, students were given Bibles as gifts, primarily Gideon Bibles.

But apart from free distribution of the Bible in some areas and widespread incidence of devotional exercises, the pedagogical question remains: how much were students learning about the Bible? To what extent did they undertake systematic study of the Bible in the sense that they would retain this knowledge and draw upon it later? In May 1963, one month before the Supreme Court ruling, Scarvia B. Anderson, of the Cooperative Test Division of Educational Testing Service, sampled and surveyed public, private, and parochial schools to determine the literary works most commonly taught in Grades 7-12 across the country. Dr. Anderson's questionnaire asked the titles of major works of literature studied by "*all* students in *any* English class." *Job* was reported by four schools out of the 547 included in the survey. No other book of the Bible was reported by more than two schools. Here is additional evidence of how rarely the Bible was studied as literature even before the decision of June 1963.

In June 1964, the U. S. Office of Education published the "Summary of Offerings and Enrollments in High School Subjects 1960-61," reporting total enrollments in all subjects across the country. At that time, three years before the Supreme Court Decision, of more than 12,000,000 students enrolled in courses in "English-Language Arts" in Grades 7-12, about 4,500 were in courses in the "Bible and Bible History," which puts it slightly under "Debate," and not even 1500 over "Penmanship." Across the secondary school curriculum, enrollments in "Bible and Bible History" were about on a par with "Botany," "Ceramics," 'Practical Nursing," and almost 1,000 under "Auditorium."

Although less comprehensive than any of the surveys reported so far, from the point of view of English teachers, a more startling study is that of Thayer S. Warshaw on knowledge about the Bible among a selected group of college-preparatory high school students in Newton, Massachusetts. Several of the students thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers, that the Gospels had been written by Matthew, Mark, *Luther*, and John. Ninety percent could not complete the statement "The love of money is the root of all *evil*." The issue here was not whether the students had been "taught" the Bible, or whether they had read it as part of a devotional exercise, but rather what they knew about it. The results of the study indicate that, before Mr. Warshaw and some of his

colleagues began formal instruction in the Bible as literature, most of these selected students had far too little information about the Bible as literature for intelligent, responsive reading in modern prose and poetry.

The Warshaw study dealt with students who had received most of their schooling prior to the Supreme Court ruling. The surveys by Harrison, Dierenfield, Humble, and Anderson report school practices in force before the 1963 decision. It seems clear that except in certain regions, there was only limited Bible study in schools, and this was devotional far more often than literary. Whatever else it may have been, the Supreme Court Decision was hardly a blow at literary studies.

Further evidence that study of the Bible as literature has been sketchy and non-systematic comes from even a casual survey of the most widely used literature anthologies in secondary schools. Typically, there are two or three Biblical selections — usually a parable and one or two psalms — and these most often in the twelfth-grade anthology, the survey of English literature. That is, instead of occurring early in the program as a reservoir material for the reading of literature in later periods, the Bible selections are saved till the end, and placed in the one year of English that is least likely to be required of all students.

Effects of Decision

Reactions to the Supreme Court Decision have been varied. Leaders in religion and in politics have taken positions along a continuum ranging from full support to total opposition. The Court has been praised for advancing the cause of individual liberties and condemned for making the Bible less accessible to school children than *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Meanwhile, however, the NCCJ's *Dialogue* quotes Alabama's Governor Wallace as saying, "I don't care what they say in Washington, we're going to keep right on praying and reading the Bible in the public schools of Alabama." *Dialogue* also reports that Governor Barnett instructed teachers in Mississippi to continue with prayers and Bible reading. Senator Olin D. Johnston, according to *Religious News Service*, advised teachers in South Carolina to continue with these devotional exercises, since "there is no statutory provision to penalize school officials for defying the Supreme Court. They can continue to pray until a court injunction is issued in each case."

After surveying the situation during the year after the decision was handed down, the National Conference of Christians and Jews concluded that "in those areas where it is the custom to begin the public school day with prayer and Bible reading, the Court's decision seems to have had little effect." Citing a statewide survey in Indiana, carried out under the auspices of the Indiana School Boards Associations, the NCCJ reported in 1964 that 39 percent of the school districts began the school day with the Lord's Prayer; 52 percent with spontaneous prayer; 27.6 percent with Bible readings. Eighty percent of the schools permit the Gideons to distribute Bibles in the classrooms, primarily in Grades 4, 5, and 6.

Meanwhile, school officials in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, made plans to substitute for daily Bible readings a study of the Bible as a "literary and historical" document. However, charges of subterfuge led to a court hearing and a delay in this plan. In September 1964, *Religious New Service* reported that the Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction had recruited five nationally-known educators to help evaluate the proposed Bible course and that approval of the course by the state education agency is necessary before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania will hold further hearings.

So far as devotional or religious purposes are concerned, therefore, the situation seems not greatly changed. The

Supreme Court is not empowered to enforce the law; its function is to interpret it. Having done so, the Court will neither explain itself further nor take additional action until cases come before it. Such cases, in all likelihood, will stem from the actions of individual citizens or of local chapters of such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union.

With respect to teaching courses in the Bible as literature, or including units on the Bible in literature courses, the response has been mixed. An eight-member state curriculum committee, appointed by the State Board of Education in Maine, recommended that public schools in the state cease using scripture for required readings in history and literature on the grounds "that non-sectarian discussion of the Bible is impossible." Subsequently, the State Board of Education rejected this recommendation and issued a policy statement permitting the use of the Bible in literature and history courses. In Indiana, meanwhile, apart from the devotional exercises reported above, increasing numbers of secondary schools are offering elective courses in the Bible as literature. This elective course for credit is described in the *Digest of Courses of Study for the Secondary Schools of Indiana,* published by the Indiana Department of Public Instruction. Descriptions of this course as it is offered in Indiana schools appear in *Curriculum Handbook,* Elkhart Public Schools; *Curriculum Handbook,* Muncie Public Schools; and in *English Course of Study for Biblical Literature,* Evansville Public Schools. Ball State University, furthermore, offers at the graduate level a Biblical literature course for teachers.

Unlike the erratic responses from schools, those of textbook publishers are rather consistent. In April 1964 the writer, on behalf of the National Council of Teachers of English, polled editors-in-chief or similar officials in selected companies which publish literature texts for secondary schools. These officials were asked (1) whether their anthologies had in the past included Biblical selections; (2) whether any change had already been made or was anticipated in view of the Court's decision; (3) whether any new books were planned or whether changes were anticipated in books other than the standard anthologies. Replies were received from each company. One company indicated that it had never included Biblical passages. The others reported that they had included such selections; that they did not anticipate adding or deleting such passages as a result of the decision; and that no significant changes were anticipated in supplementary texts or other books. In short, so far as teaching materials themselves are concerned, the situation is much the same. In the standard literature anthology series, the student will generally read up to a maximum of four Biblical selections — including at times one or two psalms, a parable, perhaps a passage from St. Paul's epistles, and one Old Testament story. Most, if not all, will be included in the twelfth-grade book as part of English literature.

For teachers and administrators concerned with the status of the Bible in the schools, certain conclusions make themselves forcefully clear:

1. Apart from those programs which openly flaunt or covertly circumvent the law, few schools provide students with an opportunity to learn about the Bible as literature. Moreover, where Bible reading is conducted without comment and in a setting that is clearly devotional or religious in intent, the conditions which surround good teaching—orderly and sequential presentation, discussion, evaluation—are unlikely to obtain. That is, if the Bible is read because local religious pressures or traditions take precedence over the Supreme Court Decision, then the program is almost surely aimed less at providing cultural and literary background than at providing sanctions for certain modes of behavior or at instilling specific moral or spiritual values.
2. The need for teaching the Bible as

literature is clear. If a literature program is to include the best of man's thoughts in their most artistic expression, to exclude the Bible is to leave a void which nothing else can fill. Moreover, intelligent and responsive reading in much of English and American literature assumes that readers bring to it a solid grounding in Biblical literature.

3. Teaching the Bible as literature is quite within the law. While the Supreme Court ruled against devotional exercises in public schools, it did make quite clear that it was not precluding instruction in the Bible "when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education."

In all likelihood there will be test cases as particular programs are brought to the attention of the Court. Even when urging South Carolina schools to continue daily Bible reading and prayers, Senator Johnston saw the possibility that an injunction might be issued in each case. The Court did not specifically define or illustrate its items "objectively" and "secular." Nevertheless, it seems reasonable that, while the question of Christ's divinity may be precluded, the matter of his humanitarianism is not. If presenting the Bible as divine revelation is excluded, teaching it as humane letters is not. To study *Job* as a classic treatment of the theme of undeserved human suffering, to trace the shepherd image in the 23rd Psalm, to explore how sentence rhythms and structures support the development of ideas in St. Paul's statement on charity (I Corinthians I:13) is to study the Bible in an objective and secular fashion.

4. Schools wishing to teach Biblical selections as literature will find scant material in traditional texts. Literature programs based heavily on anthologies provide too few selections and these too late to give either a substantial or a well-timed body of reservoir literature. Happily copyright laws will not prevent schools from duplicating appropriate selections and collecting such selections into a locally produced "anthology" where it seems appropriate. In the meantime, since the anthology represents a considerable investment for publishers as well as for schools, a substantial increase in the number of Biblical selections included is unlikely unless many schools strongly urge such inclusion.

5. Ironically, the Bible is a "controversial issue." Two traditional, but fruitless responses to controversial issues have been avoiding them or pretending they are not controversial. Avoidance creates a bland curriculum. Pretending they are not controversial invites attacks which might well have been prevented. Schools wanting to avoid the strange situation in which the Bible falls before the censors will take the same steps that they would take when teaching any potentially censorable materials. With the support of administrators and boards of education, they will frame a clear philosophy of why they are teaching selections from the Bible, which selections, and how these will be presented.

Such steps are not easily taken. Teachers may well ask whether teaching selections from the Bible is worth the effort and risks. It is worth them only if it matters that even the best of our students may otherwise approach allusive literature thinking that Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers.

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